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Teaching with images: opportunities and pitfalls for Holocaust education

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ABSTRACT

Based on a sample of the most commonly used textbooks and online teaching resources, we find that photos play a central but deeply problematic role in Holocaust education in the UK. The impact of photos on a generation of 'primarily visual learners' is significant. But an over-reliance on a set of problematic stock photos, inadequate or erroneous captioning, and a lack of prompts for a critical analysis of photos create problems. Their combined effect can adversely affect understandings of this difficult history, and limit the development of visual literacy skills required for tackling contemporary misinformation and visual indoctrination.

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1. Introduction

Images are central to engaging pupils with history. They attract attention, draw learners into the subject matter, and help them imagine past worlds. Holocaust education is no exception. Because many aspects of the Holocaust were extensively documented by photographers at the time, there is a plethora of images that educators can choose from to engage their students. These photos are vital in helping pupils make the enormous imaginative leap that is required to comprehend historical events which are very far removed from their own lived experience. But photos can only play a useful role if they are used as what they are: primary sources in their own right, often created with less than benign ideological intentions, and requiring careful decoding and critical analysis.[1] If used appropriately, such photos present unique opportunities for enhancing historical understanding of the Holocaust, and also for developing visual literacy.[2] This in turn is transferable to many different scenarios and, in an age of the mass circulation and consumption of political images, a vital citizenship skill. Conversely, a problematic selection of photos, misleading captioning, and a general tendency to treat photos as illustrations rather than sources, can create harmful misconceptions. Photos convey information in themselves. But they also act as filters through which pupils absorb and interpret textual information.[3] A poor

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use of photos will therefore have wide-ranging consequences for all aspects of Holocaust teaching. This is why their use merits closer scrutiny.

Photos feature in all history textbooks currently used in UK secondary schools that cover the Holocaust, from Key Stage 3 to A level. Textbooks do not, of course, offer a complete insight into what goes on in classrooms. Generally, the role of textbooks and officially accredited teaching materials has declined, as teachers draw more readily on sources and images from the internet.[4] But this is less true for Holocaust education than for other topics. The 2009 IoE report found that textbooks were valued by over two-thirds of teachers surveyed.[5] Because the moral stakes in tackling such a difficult history are high,[6] many teachers feel uneasy about designing their own learning activities, or embracing fully student-led modes of inquiry.[7] Instead, the teachers see the use of textbooks, alongside websites by 'reputable' organizations, as minimizing the risk of teaching this difficult topic. Even when teachers create their own classroom presentations, photos from textbooks and online teaching resources remain central: teachers recycle them on worksheets or slideshows, for fear of using inappropriate or fake images if they download unvetted materials from the internet. One teacher shared that she used a photo of Jewish children standing at the barbed wire at Auschwitz-Birkenau as an introductory 'hook-in' to studying the Holocaust. Ironically, the photo in question, which we discuss below, actually *is* a fake image: but it appears trustworthy because it features in a reputable textbook.

To explore the role of photos in UK Holocaust education, we have analyzed their use in a sample of 30 history textbooks currently in use in UK schools. While many other countries use standardized textbooks, in the UK, purchasing decisions about textbooks are made by individual schools or even individual teachers.[8] As a result, a wide range of textbooks are currently in circulation. And because books are expensive to replace, many UK schools still use textbooks that may have been purchased a decade or more ago.[9] All textbooks we analyzed were produced after 1991, i.e. after the introduction of the National Curriculum, which made Holocaust education compulsory. Many exist in multiple editions, but publishers often omit the publication dates of new editions. This is a deliberate move to prolong the lifespan of textbooks, avoiding the impression that a textbook with a publication date of one or two decades ago may be outdated. As a result, neither teachers nor students can get a clear sense of what state of knowledge a textbook reflects.

In addition, we have included in our analysis a sample of online Holocaust education materials, which UK teachers report using to create their own resources or presentations for the classroom.[10] Here, too, textual information is invariably accompanied by multiple photos. Websites, too, do not always state clearly when they were created, but as they are easier to edit, most reflect more contemporary approaches. As we shall show, however, problems in the use of images that occur online closely mirror those we have identified in our textbook sample. One notable exception is the 2020 textbook 'Understanding the Holocaust.'[11] As a book just about the Holocaust, it differs from all other textbooks, which only devote one unit or section to this topic. The UCL textbook contains not only a great deal of additional information, but also a much greater number of photos. Throughout our analysis, we have highlighted where findings from this textbook significantly differ from the others in our sample. As we shall show, the types of photos included in the UCL textbook is very different, but the treatment of photos as unproblematic illustrations rather than sources for analysis persists.

An additional complication arises from the use of other media in teaching the Holocaust. Holocaust fiction plays a significant role in UK classrooms. Popular feature films combine an emotionally impactful narrative and engaging visualizations.[12] Although there are as yet no reliable statistics on their use, a significant proportion will show *Schindler's List* or *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* in the classroom. Although riddled with historical errors, such films are widely used to create an affective engagement with the Holocaust. They also offer a sense of emotional release through hopeful endings, making them an attractive tool for mitigating the risk of emotional trauma inherent in the subject matter. An unintended side effect of their use is that such films reinforce the dominance of images as interpretative frames, through which pupils make sense of other information. The temptation of interpreting historical photos in textbooks and other learning materials as if they were 'screenshots' from such films is strong.

This problem is particularly acute with 'Gen Z,' i.e. children born between the late 1990s and the early 2010s. Studies have shown them to be 'primary visual learners.'[13] Such pupils are likely to look for visual clues before they take in any written or verbal information. Teachers, however, will typically use images to illustrate and consolidate key points, asking students to examine images to generate questions, after which the focus quickly turns to text or teacher explanation. The ambition to contextualize images is certainly laudable. But it does not come to grips with the suggestive power of images itself: a power that remains unchecked if the image itself is not analyzed, but just used illustratively.

This article examines some of the problems such images create, and in doing so, offers suggestions as to how we might improve current practice. We have focused our analysis on the following key questions:

- How many photos are used in sections of textbooks discussing the Holocaust, how much space do they occupy, and how does this compare to the use of images in other mainstream topics of the historical curriculum?
- Is there a canon of constantly reproduced Holocaust images, or are they marked variations between different textbook publishers and/or different key stages of the curriculum?
- Which aspects, geographical sites, and chronological phases of the Holocaust do these images depict?
- What is the relationship between these images and accompanying textual materials?
- What, if any, questions are pupils invited to answer about images?
- Whose photos are used, and do textbooks raise questions about perspective and bias in images taken by Nazi perpetrators, by Allied liberators of camps, in photos that were staged recreations taken at later dates, and photos taken by Jewish and other victims?

2. Holocaust photos in UK textbooks

The overall number of photos in our sample is several hundred. (To give a precise number is impossible, because many photos appear in different variations, cropped, or as enlargements of individual details, where other books use the same photo in

its entirety). In this section, we shall identify significant commonalities in the use of photos across the sample. Our first observation is that, while Holocaust photos play a crucial role in textbooks, they occupy slightly less space than illustrations of other periods. This is even more true if we exclude drawings and material from fictional films. (The textbook *Investigating History*, Foundation Edition by J.D. Clare, 2007, in the section dealing with the Holocaust contains 10 drawings and one photo. The *Modern Minds* textbook, part of the *Think Through History* series published by Longman, 2003, in chapter 9 includes three historical photos, three modern photos, three drawings and one of the publicity posters for the film 'Schindler's List'). Across our entire sample, a typical double-page spread contains between 3 and 5 historical photos about the Holocaust. This compares to 4–7 images in sections about the Vietnam War, and 4–8 on the First World War. In sections dealing with earlier historical periods, such as peasant life in the Middle Ages, the discrepancy is even starker: here, many textbooks include large pictures of artifacts and reconstruction drawings of villages, to visualize the nature of work in the Middle Ages. The mix of different, often very colorful and large images plays a prominent role alongside typically brief text. In comparison, the presentation of the Holocaust is less dominated by images.

UK history teachers frequently state that the primary purpose of images in the classroom was to address the pupils' difficulty of imagining life in remote periods.[14] Visualizations, including imaginative drawings, appear to be a key method for addressing this challenge. The assumption is that pupils will find it impossible to imagine life in medieval England without a plethora of visual representations. But this explanation poses as many questions as it answers. While everyday life in 1950s Manchester may be less difficult to imagine than that in a thirteenth-century village, the experience of life in a Nazi ghetto or a concentration camp is certainly no less 'removed' from the lifestyles of typical twenty-first-century English schoolchildren than everyday life in a medieval village – and in some ways more so. So clearly, other factors are at work in shaping the comparative caution around the use of historical photography.

The selection of photos in these textbooks itself offers some answers. Across our sample, we found an interesting disconnect between the narrative and the images themselves. A small group of photos are grossly overrepresented. We identified a small number of 'stock' photos of the Holocaust (some of which appear in multiple different variations). But these are uneven in their coverage of what might be regarded as different phases and sites of the Holocaust. Indeed, some key moments hardly ever appear in our textbook sample. Photos of deportations, for example, are almost entirely absent from these books, although there is a wealth of historical photography that could be used. A second photographic archive that is almost entirely ignored pertains to Jewish life in the ghettos. There is only one significant exception: a photo from the 'Stroop Report,' one in a series of images taken by members of the Nazi *Propagandakompanie* documenting the clearing of the Warsaw Ghetto in 1943. The 'Child at Gunpoint' is one of our stock images.[15] We shall return to the significance of this image below. Apart from that, Nazi ghettos are rarely depicted.

And there is another significant omission. Most textbooks in our sample, especially those published over the past 10 years, make efforts to include the perspective of victims when it comes to the text – usually by citing survivor testimony. But we did

not find a single example of a photo taken by a Jewish photographer, except in the UCL textbook.[16] This is in spite of the fact that such photos have become a major focus of scholarship for at least two decades. Scholars have discussed archives of pre-1939 Jewish photography and emigration photos;[17] secret Jewish ghetto photos;[18] and Jewish photography in camps.[19] So far, all this has had no discernible effect on pedagogy.

Instead, the most frequently used photos in our textbook sample fall into three categories. They show Auschwitz; they show atrocities committed by the *Einsatzgruppen*; and they show both real and re-staged photo taken by Allied liberators of Nazi camps. We shall discuss these images and their uses in turn, and then reflect on how they relate to the use of photos of events leading up to the Holocaust proper.

2.1. Auschwitz

The most widely reproduced photos in our sample depict architectural features of the concentration camp at Auschwitz, and the adjacent extermination camp of Auschwitz-Birkenau. The first shows Auschwitz's infamous wrought iron gates with the 'Arbeit macht frei' inscription. The gate is usually shown open, suggesting to the casual viewer that people were apparently free to wander in and out of the camp. Even more problematically, the inscription, although it is the central focus of attention, is barely ever explained in captions. But it is anything but self-explanatory. The slogan was borrowed from a 1873 novel by Lorenz Diefenbach about the alleged benefits of physical labor for social rehabilitation. It also echoed the valorization of physical work in large-scale work creation schemes of the Nazi regime, such as motorway construction.[20] But Auschwitz had nothing to do with work creation, or the supposed rehabilitation of individuals through work. Nazi propaganda had also deployed this language sarcastically, especially when showing pictures of rabbis and elderly Jews forced to do manual labor or clean streets in front of laughing bystanders. This is what inspired this motto. Whatever 'work' took place at Auschwitz was slave labor, labor designed to kill, not to liberate. We have found no incidences where the accompanying questions or activities in the textbook prompt students to analyze the motto critically.

The second Auschwitz stock photo comes from Birkenau, and shows the train tracks leading up to the entrance of the extermination camp. The various versions of the photo we found are all taken from near-identical perspectives, although at different times: some were taken before, some after 1945. In either case, the photos hardly ever show people: they certainly do not show victims. The architecture is presumed to speak for itself. But pupils are not supported to 'read' these architectural features. This is all the more problematic because here, too, the physical structure is a piece of Nazi propaganda. Like the first image, this photo, too, looks eminently 'German' – although the site was of course located in Poland. The building style was a fusion of functionality and German Reform Movement (roughly equivalent to the English Arts and Crafts movement). The vernacular red brick, the high-pitched roofs, which Nazi architectural theorists such as Schultze-Naumburg thought a feature of properly Aryan architecture, the medieval 'gatehouse' ceremonially marking the entrance to a castle complex or estate: all these conjure up a nostalgic, Romanticized image of German 'Heimat'.[21] They are combined with the purpose-built features that made this site a factory of death. The train lines in the foreground of the Auschwitz-Birkenau photo not only signify the end point of the

vast infrastructure of deportations. They also serve as a visual metaphor for industrial genocide. The resulting synthesis is an uncanny amalgam of nationalist kitsch and murderous technology. If properly analyzed, these photos can raise interesting questions about the ideology at the heart of the Holocaust. But not a single textbook poses such questions. The captions refer simply to the placename: Auschwitz (more rarely: Auschwitz-Birkenau, thus contributing to the confusion between the labor camp and the extermination camp). We found no example where the image is treated as a source that pupils are invited to analyze or interpret.

A third photo that sometimes supplements these general views of Auschwitz and Birkenau in textbooks are details of the crematoria. These photos were taken after liberation. In most versions, they show no people, and no sense of any human agency. The culprit, such photos imply, was a 'culture' or a 'system.' Of course, it is impossible for anyone image to convey the identities of all victims, or the variegated identities and motivations of the different kinds of perpetrators involved. This makes it all the more important that such photos are properly contextualized. But captions that simply label them as 'Ovens at Auschwitz' do none of that work.

There are a handful of exceptions, which show victims at Auschwitz-Birkenau. They include *Presenting the Past 4: The Modern World*, *Discovering the Past (Y9): Peace & War*, and *A World of Change 1900-2000 (2003)*, as well as online resources created by the British Library (British Library, n.d.) and the TES (Times Educational Supplement, n.d.), which include one or both of the two photos. The first, according to its caption, shows prisoners 'putting a dead body into an oven.' But this photo is not authentic. It was re-staged by the Red Army after the liberation of the camp.[22] The second photo shows a group of children at Birkenau, wearing oversized prisoner uniforms, standing between rows of barbed wire. This photo, too, was re-staged. In the absence of authentic photos of these events, one might argue that these are useful substitutes. But their use entails two major problems. First, none of the captions point out these photos' provenance. In a field that is plagued by Holocaust denial and allegations about evidence tampering – something that young people will inevitably encounter on social media – such a casual use of re-created evidence is counter-productive. But it is also the subject matter of the photos that is misleading, on two counts. First, the photo of children in uniforms re-stages a reality that never existed. Young children were not deemed fit for hard physical labor at Auschwitz: they were separated from their parents on arrival, and sent directly to gas chambers. Dressing them up in (adult) prisoner uniforms misconstrues their treatment. Second, perpetrator photos never showed the mass killing at Birkenau: hiding the evidence was integral to the Nazi strategy. Certainly, the existence of the camp was not disguised. We also have one instance of a photo album, known as the 'Auschwitz Album' or the 'Lily Jacob Album,' where SS photographers documented the 'processing' of a group of Hungarian Jews who had just arrived on a train. But mass murder itself was not permissible as a subject for photography. So passing the re-staged photos off as authentic misleads learners about motivations of perpetrator-made images. The only authentic photos of mass murder at Birkenau that exist are a famous set of four secret images taken, at enormous risk, by victims themselves.[23] These photos are blurry and enigmatic. Their attributes reflect the unimaginably difficult situation in which they were taken, from inside a gas chamber, while fellow prisoners stood guard. These photos would offer a perfect opportunity to invite learners to reflect on who took

photos and why, how the perpetrators' gaze differs from that of the victims. But they are absent from all learning materials except the UCL textbook. Instead, the uncritical use of re-staged photos obscures precisely these source questions.

2.2. Atrocity photos

Unlike the Auschwitz images in our sample, perpetrator agency is shown in photos that depict atrocities committed by *Einsatzgruppen*, the paramilitary death squads of the SS. Together with Order Police battalions, they executed around 2 million civilians, including over one million Jews.[24] These images are graphic, showing the act of killing, and victims either on the brink of death, or after they have been shot. The most widely used one of these is a cropped version of an execution photo, showing only one mother and her child in the Soviet Union, with the executioner holding a gun to her head. Older textbooks in our sample also use group images with several victims standing at the edge of a death pit.

Two significant questions arise from this. The first relates to the nature of culpability. Textbook narratives consistently define the Holocaust in terms of the industrialized nature of killing, as epitomized by Auschwitz-Birkenau, the first and largest among the many purpose-built extermination camps. But this narrative is often accompanied by *Einsatzgruppen* photos. It is not clear how such images relate to the people-less photos of the camps. And captions provide scant explanation of the role of the *Einsatzgruppen,* and the 'Holocaust by bullets.' Moreover, where victims' voices are included as excerpts from survivor testimony, this does not relate to these photos. Some survivors describe how they escaped Nazi Germany before 1940, for example on the *kindertransport*. Other testimony comes from individuals who survived the Nazi camp system, and were liberated in 1945. Neither form of testimony relates to the actions of *Einsatzgruppen,* which left practically no survivors behind. It is therefore impossible for pupils to relate these photos meaningfully to the text. A second problem relates the extent to which such photography was complicit in the violence. This is not a reason not to use these photos in the classroom. But it is a strong reason to point students to the ideological intent behind photos designed to denigrate, humiliate and dehumanize victims. Showing these photos without such explanations raises serious ethical problems.

In the absence of suitable photos, some textbooks use artwork to visualize the perspective of victims of the Holocaust. *Investigating History: A World Study after 1900* (Hodder & Stoughton, 2007 reprint of 2003 original) combines *Einsatzgruppen* photos with drawings by victims: David Olère's painting of victims being locked in the gas chamber, and Zofia Rozenstrauch's beating of a female prisoner at Auschwitz. Another, older textbook, The Era of the Second World War, by Josh Brooman (Longman, 1993), reproduces a watercolor by Władysław Siwek, showing the selection of female Auschwitz prisoners for extermination. Highly unusual in our sample, these artworks invite viewers to share of a different gaze. Rozenstrauch was Jewish. Deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1944, she survived and settled in Israel after the war. Her colored drawing adopts the style of a cartoon: it is almost mocking in its depiction of the perpetrators' cruelty. Polish-born artist Siwek was imprisoned at Birkenau in 1940, and a number of other camps subsequently. After the war, Siwek worked at the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum, first as a head of education department (1949–1952), and then as director

(1952–1953).[25] Siwek worked as a painter for the SS staff at the camp, portraying officers or decorating lampshades and other objects. This activity gave him access to drawing materials, allowing him to make private sketches, on which, in part, he based his later artwork, through which he conveyed his testimony visually. Unlike Rozenstrauch's, Siwek's art work is realistic, a mimics the documentary ambition of photography. Finally, David Olère, of whose work we found three examples in our sample, adopts a more imaginative style. His images are charged with pathos, depicting apocalyptic scenes of suffering in impactful ways. Polish-born Olère had trained at the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts, and later settled in Paris, designing costumes and publicity posters. He was deported to the Drancy camp in 1943, and from there to Auschwitz-Birkenau in the same year.[26] At Birkenau, Olère worked in a Sonderkommando tasked with burning bodies and cleaning gas chambers after use. Immediately after his liberation in 1945, Olère captured these experiences in a series of drawings and oil paintings.

The inclusion of these images fills an important gap in documenting the victim perspective of Auschwitz-Birkenau in particular. Interestingly, all these textbooks refer to the images in questions as sources, rather than just using them as illustrations. And yet, captions provide scant information on why these pictures were made: in several instances, the artist is not even named. The books also make no distinction between the aesthetics of the images. The different styles – from documentary via emotive to the caricature – which are an important part of the message conveyed are not subject to discussion in any of the accompanying text or questions, either. This then, is a classic case of a lost opportunity: an opportunity not only to analyze valuable sources, but also to ask about the act of witnessing itself, and appreciate that images by victims of the Holocaust, like written testimony, can provide a vital counter-point to the perpetrators' account.

2.3. Liberator photos

Another prominent type of image in our core set are liberator photos. Most show emaciated survivors, often barely clothed, and naked corpses. The most widely used photo, in differently cropped versions, shows dead bodies lined up on the ground at Bergen-Belsen (e.g. *The Twentieth Century,* 1995, and *The Era of the Second World War*, original edn 1993). The photo was taken by a British soldier. Although the intent is benign, photos like this one, too, show victims as possessing no agency and no visible individual identity. This problem has barely been addressed in discussions about the use of such photos in educational settings. Instead, recent studies have claimed that graphic photos of Nazi atrocities have been under-used pedagogically, but can help avoid sanitising the Holocaust's brutal reality. Lenga and Hébert have independently argued that exposing students to graphic images of violence can have beneficial pedagogic effects, as long as they are framed by appropriate teacher guidance.[27] As our sample shows, such images are by no means absent from UK teaching materials. Moreover, it is important to bear in mind that pupils do not enter the classroom as empty vessels. Graphic images of Holocaust victims circulate widely online, in television documentaries, and in computer games. As we shall see, they also feature prominently on Holocaust education websites. The challenge of deploying such images in educational settings is therefore less about breaking alleged taboos, and more about developing a visual literacy that would allow

pupils to analyze the political agendas at work in the production of such photos. Liberator photos, too, require decoding. Their aim was not to denigrate the victims: but they were designed to shock, to legitimate the war effort, and to draw attention to the heroism of Allied troops. Photos of piles of naked bodies, or barely-clothed survivors in pitiful physical states, were taken with little regard for the dignity of those being photographed. Research has revealed that in modern audiences, such photos, especially when presented out of context, elicit almost no pity or empathy.[28] These photos have also shaped later visual representations of the Holocaust, which now provide a lens through which modern audiences view these sources. The liberator photos we found most frequently in our textbook sample show survivors in the iconic 'striped pyjamas' uniforms, and thus run the risk of invoking the film of the same title more powerfully than the historical events they document.

2.4. Photos before the Holocaust

Another striking feature is how textbook photos depict victims of Nazi racial persecution at different stages between 1933 and 1945. Illustrations on pages discussing Nazi Antisemitism before 1939 predominantly focus on Jews as individuals. This is aligned with accompanying survivor testimony, which focuses on the specificity of each person's experience. However, most photos of events after 1939 depict victims as an anonymous mass or collective. In this way, these photos are, at least subliminally, aligned with the Nazi strategy to deprive Jewish victims of individuality agency and dignity, reducing them to cyphers of a collective racial identity. This problem is reinforced by the fact that none of the textbooks in question make it clear who took these photos, and why. Photos are presented as authentic glimpses into a historical reality, not as primary sources that express a particular point of view.

An interesting transition between these two genres of photos is provided by the constant reproduction of one photo later labeled 'A Child at Gunpoint.'[29] This photo, which we identified as one of the stock images in our sample, was taken by a member of the Nazi *Propagandakompanie* during the clearing of the Warsaw ghetto in 1943, who had received orders from commandant Stroop to document 'the end of Jewish life in Eastern Europe.' This particular image was also one of the 36 selected by Stroop himself to commemorate these events. In many ways, it conforms to the perpetrator vision of Jewish victims as a helpless and amorphous mass. Like others in the Stroop report, this photo shows an arrest. We see a group of Jewish civilians being escorted out of a house by members of the SS, to be executed or deported to camps. Like the other photos in the series, this image hides the massive military force used to suppress the Jewish uprising. The victims appear to be surrendering almost spontaneously in the presence of a handful of Germans, the machine guns pointing at them remain invisible. But in this photo, unlike in all the others from the same report, the group is seemingly 'led' by an individual Jewish boy. He happens to be at the front of the line of the section of people captured in the shot. But the placement in the photos visually transforms him into the leader of this group. In this way, this photo focuses the viewer's attention on one individual, even though he is also part of a larger crowd. The image therefore provides a metaphorical bridge between photos depicting individuals before 1940, to photos depicting victims as an amorphous mass after 1940.

3. Online teaching resources

Alongside textbooks, teachers regularly use online teaching resources. The most popular ones cited by UK history teachers whom we have worked with were created, respectively, by the Imperial War Museum (IWM), the Holocaust Education Trust (HET), and the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust (HMDT). In addition, the teachers occasionally draw on international sites, such as that by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. All of these organizations have created richly illustrated websites, of which the purpose-built teaching resources typically constitute some of many dozens of subpages aimed at audiences beyond the classroom.[30] This means that overall, one site can contain several hundred photos. For the purposes of this analysis, we shall focus only on photos that appear within the dedicated teaching resources sections of these websites.

The IWM site is unusual in that photos here feature only inside short information videos of just over 2 minutes length. The videos combine audio, occasional film footage, and a mixture of historical photos and photos taken inside the museum's pre-2021 Holocaust Galleries. The videos are organized in four subsections entitled respectively 'An Introduction to the Holocaust,' 'The Start of the Second World War,' 'Implementing the Final Solution,' and 'Survival Stories.' Each section consists of around eight short films, each featuring one or more photos. The photos themselves have no captions; their content is elucidated by the spoken narrative. These narratives do not, however, relate to the photos *as* photos. Instead, they describe what we see in the image, as if we were looking directly into the past. With one exception, the identity of the photographer or the provenance of the images are not discussed in any of the nearly 40 films.

The idea of the camera as an authentic window into the past is further underscored by the use of sound effects, such as the screeching wheels and whistle of a train in motion in the film clip on deportations – although the photo shows the train standing still at a platform (Radegast, the main station used to deport Jews from the Lodz ghetto: this information is not provided on the site). Not even the credits clarify whether this is an official German photo of deportations, or one of those taken illicitly by Jewish photographers at Lodz, such as Henryk Ross. Instead, the photo is combined with the testimony of an unnamed survivor, describing in graphic detail the conditions on these train journeys, without reference to any specific site or timeframe.

In general, the image selection on this site reflects some of the patterns that we have identified in textbooks. Here, too, photos usually include the same two iconic views: the 'Arbeit macht frei' gate at Auschwitz, and the train tracks leading through the gatehouse of Birkenau. Where the IWM resource differs from the textbooks is in its extensive use of photos of a model of the same camp, which was part of the old Holocaust galleries at this museum. The model is used to explain the processing of newly arrived inmates at Birkenau, and the so-called selection. This is supported by spoken testimony; the photo of the model functions as a three-dimensional map. In general, because in the IWM teaching resources, the text is spoken rather than written, users will spend most of their time listening and simultaneously looking at an image. This allows for the inclusion of many more images. This may be why deportation photos are included here, which rarely feature in textbooks. But this simultaneity also exacerbates the disconnect between the visual and verbal information, because the narrator typically discusses events which, in

scope and chronology, far exceed the specificity of the situation depicted in the image. The only example of a photo being the actual object of discussion on the IWM site is in a video about a photo of the Bergen Belsen concentration camp taken by an unidentified British liberator. The narrative comments on the importance of photos like this one in alerting the world to the extent of Nazi crimes against humanity. But again, the photo is assumed to speak for itself: there is no attempt to problematize the 'liberator gaze.' The narrator assumes automatically benign effects of images like this on public awareness of the Holocaust.

Online teaching materials created by HET are more varied. Photos typically appear just as illustrations, but there are exceptions. One resource pack specifically focuses on the interpretation of photos. Entitled 'Pre-war Jewish Life,' it is offered as a PowerPoint presentation, and as a set of mostly but not wholly identical set of 15 downloadable 'Picture Cards,' each with a caption and associated question. The first card shows a mother and child in traditional Dutch costume at a port side. The question on the reverse reads: 'What do you think this photograph shows and can we learn anything about the identity of these people from the photograph?' The question, according to the associated 'Guidance Notes' for teachers, is intended to alert learners to the dangers of reading images too literally. Not only are those depicted not easily recognized as Jewish: the photo also tricks viewers into believing they are looking at Dutch citizens. In reality, the subjects were German, who, like many tourists, dressed up and posed for the camera in a fanciful version of a supposedly national costume as part of their holiday experience. The other cards show a variety of mostly group photos of Jewish youth organizations, sports clubs, classroom scenes, family portraits, etc. from different European countries, urban and rural settings, and reflecting the lifestyles of different social classes. According to the 'Guidance Notes,' the overall pedagogic aim is to encourage a close reading of the images, and alert learners to the dangers of jumping to quick conclusions about people's identities on the basis of visual appearances that conjure up prejudices and stereotypes. Most of these photos then feature again in a second set of cards, which explores the fate of the different Jewish communities depicted in them during the Holocaust. This resource, then, invites critical reflection on the use of photos as historical sources, and addresses pedagogic challenges around visual literacy.

Paradoxically, this method is only applied to images created *by* victims: when it comes to perpetrator-made images, the HET materials offer no prompts to read photos critically. A downloadable PowerPoint presentation called 'The Final Solution' instead uses official Nazi photos, most but not all of which come from the famous Auschwitz Album, to illustrate the operation of the labor and death camps. Here, the use of the photos is purely illustrative, no information about their provenance is provided, and no questions about photographic bias are raised. The same applies to a similar set of photo cards about life in European ghettos. Captions and guidance notes merely explain locations and dates, and ask factual questions about ghettos; misperceptions that such obviously propagandistic and racist images might engender are not explored. In other words, while private Jewish photos are problematized as historical sources, perpetrator images, while extensively used, are taken as authentic reflections of a historical truth.

HMDT learning resources are also widely used in schools. Here, materials on the Holocaust sit alongside others pertaining to genocides in Cambodia, Rwanda and Bosnia, and comparisons are explicitly encouraged. Information about the Holocaust –

for example, on dedicated pages about ghettos, *Einsatzgruppen,* and different camps – is almost entirely text-based. Illustrations are rare and very small. However, a PowerPoint slideshow for use in school assemblies on Holocaust Memorial Day makes more use of photos. It focuses almost exclusively on Auschwitz, combining the same iconic two views described above with modern photos of survivors, some modern aerial photography of the site, two other historical photos, and a set of images taken after liberation showing inmates, the remains of the infrastructure of the gas chambers and crematoria, as well as piles of shoes and belongings of murdered prisoners. In general, the use of photos in HMDT materials closely mirrors patterns identified in the textbooks. Questions about the status of photography as a historical source do not feature in any of these materials.

An exception to many of the trends identified here is the 2021 UCL textbook 'Understanding the Holocaust: How and Why did it happen.' Because this book is wholly dedicated to the Holocaust, it features a much wider range of photos than those in our textbook sample. This includes photos of stages of the Holocaust normally elided, including deportations, ghettos, and death marches in 1945. Many visual clichés, such as the two Auschwitz gates, have been avoided altogether. *Einsatzgruppen* photos are included, but in small formats to reduce their graphic effect: most appear in a specialist chapter on this topic, so are properly contextualized. There are only two liberator images (pp. 65, 87), which show fully clothed survivors.[31] The use of photos taken by victims, too, is thoughtful. Alongside numerous properly captioned images of Jewish life before Nazism, it includes one photo of Jewish partisans (p. 71), and two secret photos taken by prisoners: one inside a ghetto (p. 67), and one of the four *Sonderkomanndo* images from Auschwitz (p. 62). All this, then addresses many of the concerns identified above. But while the photo selection is more thoughtful, captions are no different from those in our sample. Labels such as 'Starving children in the Warsaw Ghetto' (p. 48) or 'Supervised by members of the Hitler Youth, Jews are forced to scrub the streets in Vienna after the Anschluss' (p. 40) raise no questions about the provenance or intention behind the photos. The role of the PK photographers is not explained anywhere in the book. Source questions relate only to textual sources: there are no invitations or prompts to analyze photos critically. The only instance where a caption tells the story of who took a photo and why is the *Sonderkommando* image. But this is the only exception. The other 119 photos in this book are illustrations, and no questions or learning tasks directly relate to them.

4. Conclusion

Much recent academic research on Holocaust education has documented and lamented its apparent failure. Studies such as the UCL reports revealed that knowledge about the Holocaust is at an all-time low, and that education has not eliminated persistent and intensifying racial prejudice and Antisemitism.[32] In this article, we suggest how the problematic use of images in Holocaust education contributes to this failure. Photos powerfully shape how we imagine the past as well as the present. To ignore the affective power of images in the classroom is to endanger the pedagogic, civic, and ethical aspirations of Holocaust education. But in spite of a proliferation of research on Holocaust teaching in the UK, the role that images play in communicating and distorting understandings of the

difficult history has been almost entirely ignored. In this paper, we have offered some observations on the most common visual representations of the Holocaust in mainstream UK textbooks and educational websites. We have identified selection biases, as well as problems with way such images are captioned, and the disconnect between textual information and photos. On this basis, we conclude that significant improvements could be achieved by addressing two major challenges.

First, we need to rethink the relationship between images and texts in learning materials. Questions and tasks should invite pupils critically to interrogate photography as a primary source, with all the attendant biases and partiality inherent in this genre. None of the textbooks we analyzed treat official Nazi documents about Jews as historical fact: publications, speeches, and even caricatures are presented as examples of Nazi ideology or propaganda. Photos, by contrast, feature as objective and authentic. In an age when political opinions and affiliations are imagined and negotiated in and through visual media, not to subject photos of the Holocaust to critical scrutiny is a pedagogic failure that not only compromises how the next generation understands this difficult history, but that also undermines any aspirations for historical education to equip these citizens of the future to apply a critical lens to the power images in contemporary politics and social life.

Second, debates about whether or not to take emotional risks in exposing students to potentially traumatic images have detracted from the more significant question of photographic bias. This problem is not confined to unhelpful captions. It also pertains to the selection of photos. The most significant issue is the virtual absence of any photos taken by victims. Those at the receiving end of Nazi racial persecution went to great lengths, and took enormous risks, to create a visual counter-archive of the Holocaust. With the exception of the 2020 UCL textbook, such photos are absent from the entirety of teaching materials currently used in the UK. But they not only tell this history from a different point of view: they also pose the question of agency in new ways, documenting a refusal to be reduced to passive victim status. Instead, photos were used defend, assert, celebrate their individuality, sociability, agency, dignity, and the hope and expectation of a better future. Including this photographic counter-archive in pedagogic practice would not only bring the use of visual evidence in line with the ethical imperative to place Holocaust survivor testimony alongside official Nazi records. It would also restore to their rightful place in history those who documented their stories and then perished in the Holocaust, and were thus unable to provide retrospective testimony.

All of this could be achieved without any ambition to be comprehensive. The key is to make photos meaningful – not to document *everything* that happened photographically. In the UK, History is not a compulsory subject after the age of 14. This has led to a compression of essential content into a sequence of key historical events. Typically, students spend about six hours studying the Holocaust in History at KS3, although it is also touched on in a number of other subjects.[33] In addition, for those choosing History as a GCSE or A level subject, the Holocaust is usually framed by examining the rise of Hitler and National Socialism, and the events of the Second World War. While GCSE and especially A level curricula allow more time to explore the issues we raised, even at Key Stage 3, a more thoughtful selection of images, and better captioning and learning activities around them, would do much to address the challenges we identified, and enhance critical visual literacy.

The question of visual literacy relates to debates about the objectives of Holocaust education more generally.[34] Some have argued that Holocaust education needs to serve moral purposes, nurture citizenship and 'immunise' pupils against the dangers of Antisemitism, racism, and populism.[35] Pushing against this, UK curricula and pedagogy have seen an increasing emphasis on 'knowledge,' which is often conceived in subject-specific terms, and linked to ideas of cultural capital, 'powerful knowledge,' and the so-called 'knowledge-rich curriculum.'[36] Here, the emphasis is on retrieval of core 'facts,' and reference Cognitive Load Theory. The UCL Study on Holocaust knowledge has revealed critical gaps.[37] Seeking to address this, Holocaust teaching in the UK today tends to focus on chronologically adjacent events and de-emphasises transferable lessons to other historical and contemporary scenarios. This approach creates a stark dichotomy between 'knowledge' and 'skills': as if knowledge consisted of 'facts' that required no interpretative skills to make sense of them. This poses particular problems when this information is presented visually. As we have seen, perpetrator images of the Holocaust are not neutral documents. If they are interpreted by pupils as conveying accurate, factual information, such photos can inadvertently perpetuate and re-inscribe the racist biases that Holocaust education is meant to eliminate.

None of this is to say that facts are unimportant. The knowledge-rich curriculum was borne out of a concern with social justice, seeking to give pupils from less advantaged backgrounds access to canonical knowledge. A secure knowledge base is at the heart of the recommendations of the UCL report, and any solution pertaining to a more effective Holocaust education needs to build on such foundations. But such a solution also needs to enable pupils to deploy this knowledge in active and critical ways – - including an ability to decode primary sources, and in particular visual evidence, where there is currently the starkest gap. This is not a question of simply adding more images to teaching resources. Carefully selected photos need to be used in meaningful ways. And pupils need to be equipped to decode them as critically as they would a Goebbels speech or a caricature from *Der Stürmer*. As we have shown here, this is not currently the case.

Notes

1. Bergen, *War and Genocide*; Kaiser and Salmons, "Encountering the Holocaust"; Lévesque, Ng-A-Fook, and Corrigan, "What Does the Eye See"?
2. Coventry et al., "Ways of Seeing: Evidence"; Kress and van Leeuwen, *Reading Images*; Phillips, "A Question of Attribution".
3. Burke, *Eyewitnessing*.
4. Haydn, "The Changing Form and Use of Textbooks".
5. Pettigrew et al., *Teaching about the Holocaust in English Secondary Schools*.
6. Kinloch, "Parallel Catastrophes?"; Salmons, "Moral Dilemmas".
7. Wrenn, et al., *Teaching Emotive and Controversial History*.
8. Foster, "Re-thinking History Textbooks".
9. Foster and Burgess, "Problematic Portrayals and Contentious Content".
10. We did not conduct formal interviews with teachers as part of this study. However, our work on co-observation of PGCE trainee teachers with more established colleagues/mentors has yielded valuable contextual information about the use of images in the classroom during Holocaust history lessons.
11. Foster, et al., *Understanding the Holocaust*.

12. Donnelly, "Teaching History Using Feature Films": Marcus, et al., *Teaching History with Film;* Marcus and Mills, "Teaching Difficult History with Film".
13. Bennett, Maton, and Kervin, "The 'Digital Natives' debate".
14. Wineburg, *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts.*
15. Raskin, *A Child at Gunpoint.*
16. See note 11 above.
17. Hirsch, *Family Frames*; Spitzer, *Hotel Bolivia*; Spitzer, "The Album and the Crossing"; Auslander, "Reading German Jewry through Vernacular Photography"; Umbach and Sulzener, *Photography, Migration, and Identity.*
18. Löw, "Documenting as a Passion and Obsession"; Kinzel, *Im Fokus der Kamera.*
19. Stone, "The Sonderkommando Photographs"; Didi-Huberman, *Images in Spite of All.*
20. Zeller, *Driving Germany.*
21. Umbach, *German Cities and Bourgeois Modernism.*
22. The history of the re-staged photos was uncovered by journalists later. See https://www.ndr.de/geschichte/chronologie/kriegsende/Auschwitz-Befreier-stossen-auf-grauenhaftes-Leid,auschwitz510.html and https://www.spiegel.de/fotostrecke/kz-auschwitz-und-holocaust-gedenktag-tag-der-befreiung-fotostrecke-166474.html (both accessed 28 June 2021).
23. See note 19 above..
24. Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews.*
25. Nowak, Biologists in the Age of Totalitarianism, especially 88–90; Sujo, *Legacies of Silence*, especially 111.
26. Olère and Oler, Witness: Images of Auschwitz.
27. Lenga, "Seeing things differently"; Hébert, "Teaching with Photographs".
28. Umbach and Stafford, "Photographs, Jews, and Nazis".
29. See note 15 above,.
30. Reading, "Clicking on Hitler".
31. Foster, et al. *Understanding the Holocaust,* 65, 87.
32. Foster, et al., *What Do Students Know and Understand about the Holocaust?*; Pettigrew, et al., *Teaching about the Holocaust in English Secondary Schools.*
33. Cowan and Maitles, *Understanding and Teaching Holocaust Education*; Gray, *Teaching the Holocaust*; Pettigrew, et al., *Teaching about the Holocaust in English Secondary Schools.*
34. Walden, "New Ethical Questions and Social Media".
35. Carrington and Short, "Holocaust Education, Anti-Racism and Citizenship"; Kinloch, "Parallel Catastrophes?"; Pearce, Foster, and Pettigrew, "Antisemitism and Holocaust Education"; Salmons, "Moral Dilemmas"; Short and Reid, *Issues in Holocaust Education*; UNESCO, & ODIHR, "Addressing Anti-Semitism Through Education".
36. Chapman, *Knowing History in Schools*; Hirsch, *Cultural Literacy*; Hirsch, *Why Knowledge Matters*; Young, et al., *Knowledge and the Future School*; Young, "Powerful Knowledge".
37. Foster, et al., *What Do Students Know and Understand about the Holocaust?*

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